[From the Boston Transcript.]

Notes on Whales and Whaling.

History indicates the Basques or Biscayans as the first civilized race that equipped vessels for whaling expeditions. At first they contented themselves with seeking whales in the adjoining seas, but as the persecuted animals grew scarcer the boldest of them sailed north and sought them in their own icy homes.

Gradually the Biscayans abandoned the pursuit. In 1735 they only sent out ten or twelve vessels, and nine years later, in 1744, abandoned altogether this branch of commerce, which they had been first to open.

EUROPEAN WHALE FLEETS.

In 1705, the Hamburg Greenland fleet consisted of sixty-five sails.

In 1768, Frederick the Great ordered whaling ships to be equipped at Sweden.

In 1774, the Swedish government gave a company at Gothenberg an exclusive privilege for twenty years.

In 1770, Denmark decided on appropriating to itself a portion of the profits which other nations had been so long acquiring on the coast of the Danish possessions in this pursuit.

In 1788, two hundred and twenty-two English vessels were engaged in the northern whaling trade.

FOR SIX HUNDRED YEARS

the whale fishery was carried on by the Basques, Biscayans, Icelanders and Norwegians, for the fiod yielded by the tongue and the oil obtained from the fat of the animal. It was not until the seventeenth century that the whale fishery engaged the maritime nations of Europe as an important branch of commerce.

WHALEBONE

entered into the commerce of the fifteenth century, and commanded the enormous price of £700 sterling a ton, exceeding a money value of the present time of $10,000. With an ignorance of science which now is laughable even to our children, who know that the material for stays and hoops is taken from the mouth, the law in the time of Charles II, appropriated the *tail* of every whale taken by an English subject to the use of the queen, for the supply of the royal wardrobe.

EARLY VOYAGES.

In 1486, the Portuguese reached the "Cape of Storms," "the Lion of the Sea," and the "Head of Africa"—as sometimes called—but which in happy augury of an ultimate passage to India was at last given the less omened name of "Cape of Good Hope" by King John II. Immediately thereafter the northern States of Europe, and particularly England and Holland, began that series of voyages not yet ended in search of an eastern passage through the floating fields and rolling mountains of ice in the Arctic Ocean. Their unsuccessful search disclosed the haunts of the whales in the bays and creeks of Spitzbergen. In 1575 a London merchant wrote to a foreign correspondent for "advice and direction as to killing the whale," and received instructions how to build and equip a vessel of two hundred tons, and to man it exclusively with experienced whale hunters of Biscay. The English now claimed Spitzbergen and all its surrounding ice and waters as having been discovered in 1553 by Sir Hugh Willoughby, who, it will be remembered, was unfortunately entangled in the ice and froze to death on the coast of Lapland. He named it Greenland, supposing it a portion of the Western continent. Under that supposition the Danes claimed the whole region, while the Dutch alleged an earlier exploration, and each of these nations sent armed forces upon the fishing ground, more to establish exclusive rights there than for the protection of their few fishermen. In 1618 a general engagement took place, in which the English were worsted. It took some fifty years to discover that it was absurd to claim jurisdiction where no permanent possession could be established by reason of the rigor of the climate, and that there were whales enough and room enough for all competitors. Thenceforward the Arctic whale fishery has been free to all nations.

In 1598, Hull, England, equipped the first vessel from that port for the Greenland whale fishery.

In 1611, a society was formed at Amsterdam to commence whaling on the coasts of Nova Zembla and Spitzbergen.

In 1661, the Dutch sent out one hundred and thirty-three (133) whalers, and between 1676 and 1782 five thousand eight hundred and eighty-six vessels left their ports, which captured during that time 32,907 whales, whose value may be estimated at least, at $100,000,000.

THE DUTCH

perfected the harpoon, the reel, the line and the spear, as well as the art of using them; and with them originated the system of rewarding the officers and crews employed in the pursuit, not with direct wages, but with shares and lays, as they are technically termed, in the spoils of the game, proportioned to skill and experience. They turned the fishery to good account, and in 1680 had 260 ships and 40,000 sailors engaged in it. They even founded a fishing settlement called Smeerenburgh, on the coast of Spitzbergen, within eleven degrees of the North Pole, and took whales in such abundance in its vicinity that ships were sent out in ballast to bring home the surplus oil and bone above the capacity of the whaling vessels. The whales, thus vigorously attacked, again changed their lurking place, and Spitzbergen was abandoned by the fishermen, so that even the site of Smeerenburg is unknown.

THE PLAIN HARPOON.

employed by the early whalers is still in use. There have been various modifications of its form, such as harpoons with one fluke, those with joints, others barbed, etc., etc.; but all these, after having had their day, have given way to the plain, primitive Dutch weapon. There have been curious machines constructed for shooting whales, and contrivances to blow the animal up, and recently attempts have been made to conquer him with an electric shock; but nothing yet has been fabricated that is at all comparable to a pair of nervous and dextrous arms, more especially if united to a stout heart. The difficulty seems to be in constructing a torpedo of sufficient force that will not encumber the boat by its size and weight.

WHALES IN AMERICAN WATERS.

In 1496 Sebastian Cabot, seeking a north-western passage to the Indies, discovered Newfoundland, and immediately the waters surrounding it were enlivened by the presence of the Basques, Biscayans, Dutch and English, in chase of the whale. In New England this animal was first sought by Captain John Smith of Pocahontas memory, on the coast of Maine. As early as 1614, or sixteen years before the settlement of Boston, an expedition was fitted out under his command "to take whales." He did not, however, meet with the success his enterprise deserved, for he says, "We found this whale fishing a costly conclusion. We saw many, and spent much time in chasing of them, but could not kill any; they being a kind of Invanates and not the whale that yields the fins and oil as expected." Leaving his vessels, Smith with eight men ranged the coast from Penobscot to Cape Cod in a boat, and after his return published a chart and gave to the country thus explored the name of New England. The Invanates he could not catch were probably the fin-back, which is often seen on our coast, but from its little value, and because of its great speed, is never sought and seldom taken. We judge also from his remark touching the fins, that he supposed that they and not the mouth yielded the prized whalebone. Scarcely had the colonists of Massachusetts planted themselves at Plymouth before its bleak and rigorous climate and rough and sterile soil forced them to resort to the sea to eke out their subsistence. The first person that is recorded to have killed a whale among the people of New England is one Wm. Hamilton, somewhere between 1660 and 1670.

NANTUCKET.

In 1672, as it appears on the town records of Nantucket, an agreement was entered into between James Loper, and the settlers there, "to carry on a design of whale fishery." The municipality and Loper became a joint monopoly for the pursuit of the whale fishery. The agreement insured to Loper one-third of the profits, ten acres of land, and commonage for two cows, twenty sheep and one horse, with necessary wood and water. A fine of five shillings for each whale killed was imposed upon all persons infringing the monopoly. Such an assumption and grant by a small village was certainly in contradiction of the character of the colony of Rhode Island, if not of Massachusetts. Holland had at this time about 200 whaling ships, England, 100. The latter paid six shillings a ton bounty on oil taken by her own fishermen, and was favorable to the pursuit in her own colonies, oil being in much demand.

Details of the Northfleet Disaster.

NEW YORK, Feb. 7.—The following are extracts from London papers:

The details of the terrible disaster to the ship Northfleet are published, from which it appears that at half-past 10 at night, the captain and others were alarmed by a cry from the officers on watch: "A steamer is right into us!" The captain and pilot rushed on deck, but before they got there, the steamer had run into the vessel, striking her amidships, and cutting her below the watermark. The carpenter quickly reported her nearly half full of water. The pumps were started promptly. The crew worked at them for some minutes, when it was found that the water was gaining rapidly. A panic seemed to seize both the crew and passengers, and afterwards they could not keep the latter in check. A crowd of men and women had rushed up from their berths, many of them only half clothed. The passengers had mostly retired; but a few were undressing. The noise of the collision is likened by one of them to a peal of thunder, and such was the violence of the shock that those standing were knocked down. It appears that the steamer rebounded and came on a second time in collision with the Northfleet. The water began to pour in, and in a very short time the passengers' quarters were swamped. The women were slower to rush on deck than the men. Many were not in a condition to go till the water rose threateningly around them. No one on board the steamer was heard to speak, although the loud shouts from the Northfleet must have made her crew aware of the terrible danger that existed. She backed for two or three minutes, and then steaming rapidly away was soon out of sight. For half an hour the scene on board the Northfleet was appalling. The women screamed, the men cursed, and fought their way towards the boats, whilst the captain and mate roared out commands to "keep back," and allow the women to get to the side of the vessel, but apparently without success. Rockets were fired, blue lights burned, and a gun tried to be loaded, but the screw of the ramrod became detached from the handle. Signals of distress were seen by several vessels, but they appear to have been regarded as signals for a pilot. The captain, finding the men determined to leave the vessel, went below and armed himself with a revolver, and ascending the poop, declared his determination to shoot the first man who tried to leave the vessel before the women were saved.

The first boat launched was lowered by a number of passengers by cutting the ropes. There being no ladder at hand, the only way of getting into it was by leaping or dropping some fifteen feet. As there was a terrible rush towards the boat the scene was of the most distressing confusion, and a man and boy fell into the water and were drowned. The officers did all they could to force the men who first got into the boat to leave it, that the women might be saved, but to no purpose. Even firing with blank cartridges (it is supposed,) at first was unavailing. About thirty persons having got into the boat, they put off. Not one of the crew was in it.

Another life-boat was then launched. A man got into it and was ordered to leave. He refused, and the captain shot him in the calf. Then Captain Knowles placed his wife in the boat and said to the boatswain, who had already got in: "Here's a charge for you, boatswain, take care of her and the rest. God bless you!" Wringing his wife's hand he bade her good bye, saying: "I shall never see you again."

It is impossible to describe the panic that raged all this time. Heartrending scenes were witnessed on all sides. One of the passengers, seeing the captain's wife in the boat, threw in his own wife, tossed the baby to her, and entered the boat himself. A little girl was thrown into the boat by her father, who tried to save the rest of his family, but the maddened crowd pressing toward the side of the vessel prevented it, and with the wife and two other children he went down with the ill-fated vessel. The engineer made frantic efforts to save his wife and children, but was jammed between the cook-house and gunwale and received dreadful injuries, though afterwards he was rescued, but is in a precarious state. Only two of the seven boats aboard were launched, owing to the panic. The first was seriously injured as the tackle was cut, and the boat fell into the sea. When the second boat got off, it seemed to become a question of moments. The quarter-deck was still crowded by men, women, and children, some crying, some swearing, others praying. The captain and pilot were together, and the latter was heard saying: "If you want to save yourselves make for the topmast!" to which many people rushed. In a quarter of an hour a tug picked up the second boat, with thirty occupants, and then steamed for some time around the spot where about three quarters of an hour after being struck the Northfleet went down head first, with awful suddenness, and with three hundred and twenty-seven souls on board.

At that moment the first boat was a hundred yards, and the second only twenty or thirty yards from the vessel. The crew of the first boat, after landing the women, rowed around the scene of the wreck, and saved five men who were trying to swim ashore.

A lugger took off the occupants of the second boat—thirty-four passengers—and a pilot cutter rescued a pilot and ten men, who, having gone down with the vessel, rose to the surface and clung to the main-topmast rigging. The vessel lies in eleven fathoms of water.

The survivors say the captain displayed the greatest heroism, and maintained his presence of mind from first to last, striving hard to put an end to the panic, doing his duty bravely to the end. He was at the last moment going across the wreck in the hope of enabling some of the crowd rushing round the boats on that side to get away from the ship. They say all the boats got adrift when the ship sunk, and they express the belief that if the passengers had allowed them to be lowered properly, they could have saved at least one hundred more lives. Unfortunately, the women could not climb the masts, although we did all in our power to help them. Consequently, all the women and children, with the exception of the captain's wife, and another and two children, were drowned.

We don't know of a more striking case of meanness than one that recently transpired in Kentucky. A festive man wagered with a Kentucky farmer that the latter could not husk 80 bushels of corn in a day. The farmer sought his work and went at it with avidity, whatever suspicions he might have had being agreeably soothed in contemplation of the success awaiting his exertions. Accident, however, led him to the house for a brief moment, and he there discovered indubitable evidence that his wife was about to elope with the other party to the wager. The hypocrisy of the other man, his smooth, soft, oily way of doing things, his consummate deceit and some other things, led to a remarkable scene. In point of fact, the farmer husked this other man and pretty near made indian meal of him; and the latter remarked at the close of the exercises, that he really believed the farmer could husk five hundred bushels of corn in a day and not half try.

The agent of a woolen mill at South Royalston, Mass., recently offered a prize of five dollars to the girl who should weave the most cloth within a period of three months. The premium excited so much enthusiasm among the operatives, that many of the female weavers began work at six o'clock in the morning, and until seven o'clock in the evening. At the end of the three months the "champion" had woven 2605 yards, the remuneration for which amounted to $123. The work was extensive and the prize was mean, but the man who offered it was meaner, for he refused to pay it.

At a recent meeting of Jews at Berlin, it was definitely resolved to form in Germany a sister alliance to the Alliance Israelite Universelle in France, founded by M. Genieux. The alliance has for its object to promote all Jewish interests, protect Jews from persecution and unequal laws, and assist destitute persons of its own persuasion. Delegates will meet triennially. A committee of twenty was appointed. The alliance will bear the name "Israelitische Alliance in Deutschland."